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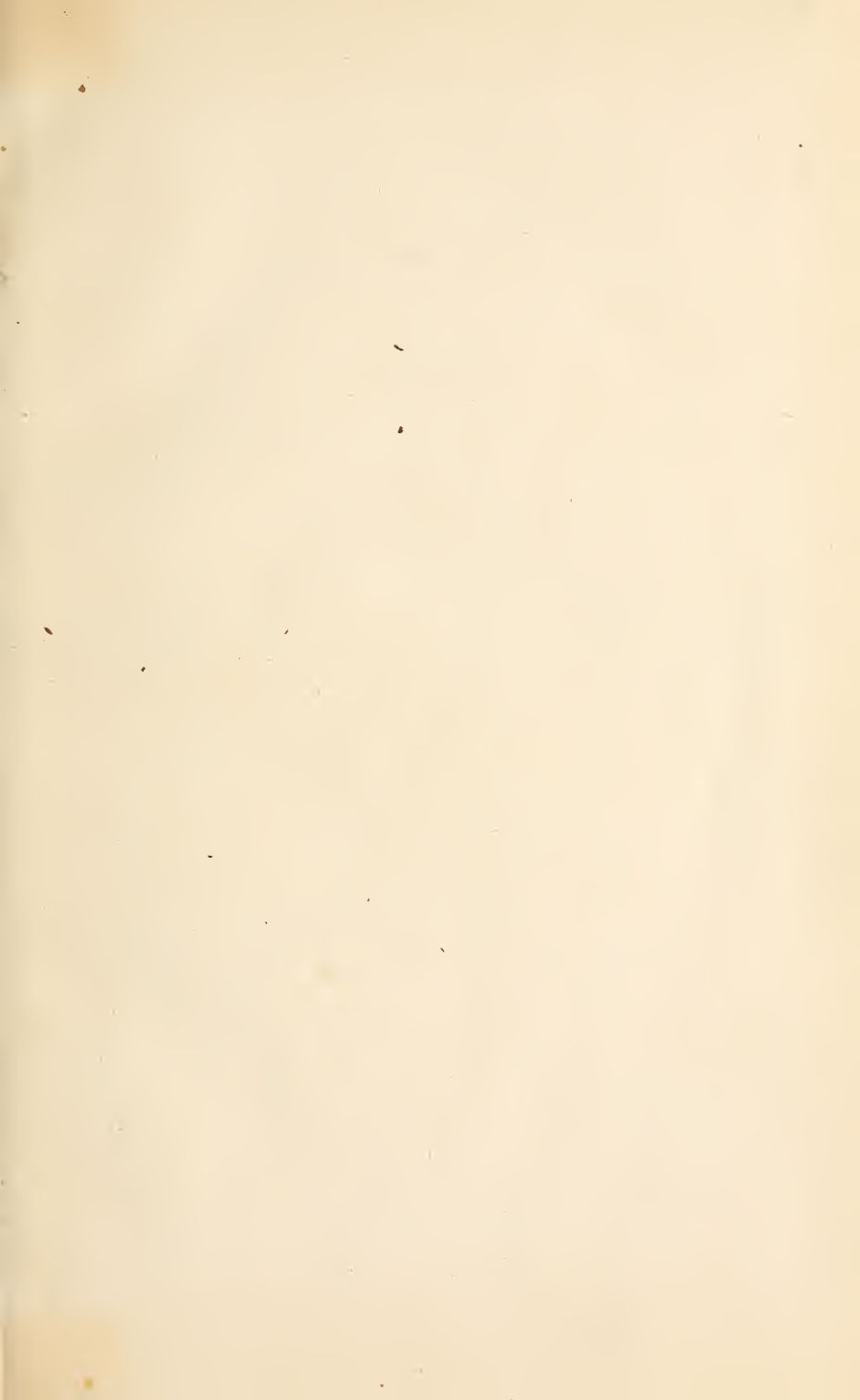


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In Memoriam.

A

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF

WILLIAM CZAR BRADLEY,

OF WESTMINSTER, VT.,

Who died March 3d, 1867.

By F. FROTHINGHAM.

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED AT THE UNITARIAN CHURCH, BRATTLEBORO, VT.,

SUNDAY, MARCH 10th, 1867.

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S E R M O N .

His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.—*Deut.*
XXXIV: 7.

We have during the past week committed to the dust the mortal part of a remarkable man. Remarkable he was in many ways ; in the power of his presence and the bulk of his brain ; in the vast sweep and the wonderful command of his information and the hunger for knowledge which no years nor weakness could still ; in the independence of his thought and his tendency to superstition ; in the ringing vigor of his voice and the wealth of fun, wit, story, history, thought and wisdom it conveyed : in the versatility and power of his mind and the position and service as a public man to which he was called ; in the place he filled in the regard of his fellow citizens and the gap he leaves behind in many hearts at almost eighty-five ; in what he did and what he did not do ; in what he was and what he was not. Not the least remarkable is the almost literal applicableness of the text to him. So much was his weakness stronger than other men's strength, so much more was he in the evening of his days than the rest of us in life's high noon ; so robust and vivid was his life even to the last, that he seemed rather to abdicate than be driven from his throne. We felt that "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated." Only four days before his death he said, after a visit from the doctor in which he had neither spoken nor seemed to heed what was

passing: "He don't like the looks of things with me." The keen eye, to appearance dim, was alert still, reading what it wished to know.

He has gone "in a good old age, an old man and full of years." The beautiful old maxim bids us speak nothing save good of the dead. This may be understood to mean Praise the dead as though they had no fault; or Eulogize their virtues, hiding their faults. Both of which dishonor the dead, corrupt the living and degrade a noble maxim into a pander to sin. A truer understanding of it is If you cannot speak well of the dead say nothing. But the noblest I take to be that which, presenting both the lights and shadows of character, interprets a man's life in the light of that good which he wished and aimed to reach. This I suppose to be the true point of view from which to judge any man; the only point from which we should be willing or consider it just to be judged. Judge any man—I care not who he be—by the light of his deeds, apart from his purpose and his aims, and there is none who will not be condemned as a miserable sinner—the best, even the great apostle, as the worst, "the chief of sinners." Judge even those whose lives we cannot approve by the standard I have suggested, and how tempered will often be our severity and how cheerful our confidence in the triumph hereafter of a rectitude which often fought but failed to conquer here, and into what a kindlier relation we shall be led towards many of the living whom now we are quick to condemn. Could I, speaking in this spirit, describe him who has gone exactly as he seemed to me, certainly the most picturesque man I ever knew, and who leaves on my memory a picture whose charm I know not how to tell, I should do a service to myself and to you.

I should not paint him as either a hero or saint; though he could be the one, and, if I mistake not, there are saints in the calendar whose names in the judgment will pale by the side of his. He did not seem to me to aim at being either. From all that I have been able to gather he seems to me to have had a lowlier aim—viz: to live well. A little poem written in his later years gives the key to his purpose. It is called

Dawn, Noon, Midnight.

Imprisoned in a living jail,
A lusty, kicking son of earth,
Ready to wake, and weep, and wail,
My limbs are struggling to the birth,
Let me pass.

Now on my feet I faltering stand,
Till by enticements bolder grown,
I quit the watchful mother's hand,
And lo! I learn to go alone.
Let me pass.

Now in youth's buoyant, merry round,
With quickened pulse my steps advance
Where music, wine, and wit abound,
And blooming beauty leads the dance.
Let me pass.

Now blest with children, wife and friends,
Ambition urging to the van,
I strive to walk where duty leads,
With love of God, good will to man.
Let me pass.

And now my better home draws nigh;
Free from presumption and despair,
But weary, faint, I wait to die,
And leave this world and all its care.
Let me pass.

To live well, I say; not above but among his neighbors—to live honestly, worthily, handsomely—so that they should not be ashamed of him, nor his country the worse, but the better for his living. I do not find that he pretended to anything more than this modest claim. His first youthful interpretation of it was the mistaken one which many young men make of confounding pleasure with good living. Coming into the world with an extraordinary amount of physical and mental vitality, finding a vast fund of enjoyment of various sorts before him, which he was peculiarly fitted to appreciate and enlarge, the temptation to it was great. But it did not hold him long. He flew only near enough to the deceitful flame to feel its heat, not near enough to burn his wings. Soon laying this early error aside he abandoned it forever. Amid the temptations of a time and a career full of inducements and opportunities to excess, he held the rudder of his self control and was master of his craft throughout the perilous voyage of his life.

He was born at Westminster in this State, March 23d, 1782. Entering life at the close of our first Revolution he died soon after the close of the second. He was wont to say that he was born in the year of the peace and had lived all his life in war. Yet when he passed away a new year of peace had come. He was a precocious boy. So rapidly did he learn that he not only entered college at thirteen or fourteen, but was considered over-fitted. He did not stay there long, but was expelled during his freshman year. His Alma Mater—a severe mother to him—did what she might to atone for her harshness, by sending him afterwards a Master of Arts degree: whether more to her honor than his let Yale herself decide. His father, sorely displeased at his disgrace, gave him a dungfork and set him to work at the manure-heap. The brave, sturdy boy did not despise his tool, but used it well, redeeming and biding his time. But other heaps were for his turning over and other fields for him to till. He soon resolved to study law. But he would be no mere lawyer. He would be the learned man which the college refused to make him. Soon he was deep in the classics again. His home position galling him, he quitted it and went to Amherst, Mass., where he studied awhile with Judge Stephen Strong, and thence to Blanford, Mass., where he continued his legal studies with Mr. Ashmun, until his father took him home again, where he completed his studies. So rapid was his progress that at twenty he was admitted to the bar (1802). Refused permission to practice in the Supreme Court on account of his youth, he had yet won so great respect and admiration by his talents, acquirements and character, that the Legislature appointed him Attorney for Windham County, and thus secured his access to the Supreme Court. He held this office for seven years. At twenty-four he became Representative to the State Legislature; at thirty a member of the State Council—which corresponds nearly to the present Senate; and at thirty-one Representative to Congress. Here he served one term during the last war with Great Britain, of which he was an advocate (1813—15); and two years after the close of which he was appointed agent of the United States under the treaty of Ghent

for fixing the North Eastern boundary. In this work, which lasted five years, he did what he esteemed the great public service of his life. Through the wild region of the North East frontier he went in person and laid down the line; which, rejected by Great Britain and disputed over with an acrimony that well nigh ended in war, he had the satisfaction of seeing adopted in the Ashburton treaty. This ended, he was sent again to Congress for two terms (1823—27). Here his public career substantially closed at forty-five; though at sixty-eight (1850), we find him again in the Legislature of Vermont, at seventy-four Presidential Elector, throwing the vote of our State for John C. Fremont (1856), and in the following year a member of the State Constitutional Convention.

During the most of his public career he was a Democrat, in the days when that word meant friend of the Republic and of the rights of man. The slavery question had not reached the portentous bigness that it afterwards assumed. It appeared only in disguise, in which it might readily mislead honest and liberty loving men. The only record I have found of his contact with it while in Congress, tells of his advocating a resolution of inquiry "whether there was in force" in the District of Columbia a law authorizing "the imprisonment of any free man of color, being a citizen of any of the United States, and his sale, as an unclaimed slave, for jail fees and other charges; and if so, to inquire into the expediency of repealing the same." Where he really stood in relation to it is shown by his joining the Free Soil party in 1848. In so doing he but carried out his life-long principles. They, with whom he had acted, forsook them. They left him, therefore, and he was of them no more. He clung to the thing he had always revered. In the trial hour it blossomed into Universal Liberty. The *name* by which he rightly called it they followed, although cunning men had baptized it into the spirit of Slavery. He kept the reality of consistency—they its shadow. He lived in the days of men whom it is the fashion to think the great men of the Republic. Born the same year as Webster, Calhoun, Benton and Cass,—whose acquaintance and respect, with that of Adams, Clay and

others of less note, he enjoyed, he seems to me, though winning no such conspicuous fame to hold a position of more real greatness than the three most famous of them. He was too wise to make the "American system." It was not in him to speak words so false to Humanity as the 7th of March speech. He would have died sooner than destroy his country for Slavery's sake. And in saying this I claim for him no extraordinary or exceptional greatness. He made no pretence to being a Reformer. He set up as advocate of no original and startling theories. He raised no quixotic standard of political or personal morals. He held to the attainment of practical ends. He was emphatically of the people. So far was he from "extreme views," so called, as to think the suffrage a privilege, not a right. He did not even rise to what I suppose the true, certainly the comprehensive, view, that it is both. I suppose it was his pride and joy to represent what may be called the advanced average thought of the people. In this respect he was like Mr. Lincoln. Perhaps it was one secret of the people's love for him. Though on their better side he kept within their reach.

On quitting public life he devoted himself assiduously to the practice of his beloved profession. It received no dishonor from him. He soon rose to eminence in it and became known and prized as the first lawyer in the State. The highest honors which his profession had to bestow he could command. But his increasing deafness laid limitations on him not to be broken through. I have been told that no man would ever go on with a suit if he advised against it. And no man can know how often he used the opportunities open to every lawyer to heal divisions and reconcile enmities—becoming, as no one had a better chance to, even to his own pecuniary loss, a peace-maker indeed. But such was the quality of the man, such his respect for his noble profession and for himself, that we may easily believe this was often the case.

But lawyer alone, even though in a broad and eminent sense, he would not be. His sympathies were too large and his activity too great for that. He loved books and men. He swept through the domain of literature with the march of a conquer-

or. The Greek and Latin classics were minutely at his command. In his old age he was delighted at finding a copy of Grotius in possession of a friend. But it was in Latin. It made no difference to him. He borrowed and read it through. With the Scriptures he was far better acquainted, in the original tongues and in the history and criticism of their text, than most ministers. Philosophy, history, poetry, or practical science, nothing worth study came amiss to him. He delighted to discuss or converse with the best minds on all living subjects. Nothing pleased him more than to gather around him those with whom he could. He was less particular about their garb or their station than about them. He seemed a living encyclopædia. No subject came up to which he could not contribute something worth hearing.

In keeping with this he was distinguished for his hospitality. In this he was seconded by his wife, to whom married while he was but twenty, he paid during more than sixty happy years, devoted and tender reverence. The latch-string truly hung outside their door. Strangers from abroad, and friends from far and near found welcome there. The wealth and prodigality of his conversation afforded a mental hospitality even more generous and attractive than that of his unselfish home. All classes of society partook of it and all classes paid for it in admiration and regard.

It may surprise some, sharing the present mania for leaving home, which works so much harm to our country towns, that so able a man was willing to spend his life in his native village. This seems to me worthy special praise. To stay at home, where he is well known, and live down the suspicions and mistrusts created by early excesses; to stay at home and compel the affection, confidence and honor which even a prophet is not apt to have in his own country; to stay at home and in face of seemingly over-mastering difficulties to make noble eminence out of nothing. I think there is something great and brave, and beautiful in that. Compare it with going away and hiding your early vice behind other men's ignorance; with going away and winning a name among those who know nothing about

your past; with going away where *you* shall have the best chance to succeed, regardless whether a home is deserted, whether parents needing your presence are left behind to grow old alone, and perhaps brothers and sisters to whom you might be a protector and a comfort mourn your absence, and whether the birth-place which bore you lose its honor which you give to strangers. I do not forget the advantages of going. Sometimes it is best; sometimes needful. But still I say he does the handsome, and the great, the gentle and the filial thing who sticks to his home and makes more of it than it was before. How many fair young lives, which have come to grief in the spider net of a great city, had been saved to their country and their dear ones, could some voice have whispered to them how much nobler things they could have done at home. Surely Vermont, aye Westminster, had been honored and advanced by the filial loyalty and love of this true son.

Another point which may surprise some is that he did not amass riches. He had something better to do. Like Agassiz he could not afford to lay up money. His sympathies and tastes were too large and hospitable for that. He could not pinch his mind and sear his heart for gold. He could not bend his back to so cheap and profitless a burden. He would not stoop to dishonorable ways of gaining it. His money he turned into prompt wealth by making others share its benefit. Generosity and honor, not avarice and cunning, were the stamp he put on every coin that crossed his palm. Now he has gone, would it have added to his fame to know that he had left half a million dollars behind? I trow that the man, in his simple manhood, with the glory of his beautiful old age around him, is a fairer sight without the gold.

His old age, how beautiful it was! How large in charity, how sweet in tenderness, how cheerful in hope, how calm in trust, how healthy in outlook. Old age is life's glory or its shame. Hard, cold, querulous, cynical, it shows life's failure. Tender, warm, kindly and believing, it testifies to life's success. During our country's deadly struggle he bated not faith in the triumph of the right when younger hearts sank well nigh in despair. He never lost interest in books or passing events un-

til repeated bereavements removed the props on which his heart chiefly leaned. His talk was marvellously rich and varied. Alas! that so much of it like milk spilled on the ground, cannot be gathered up again. Who that once saw his glad, bright smile, a very sunshine, can ever forget it? His whims and superstitions—for strange as it may seem, this strong man was careful to kill the first snake he met in the spring-time, to pay no money on Monday, and to see the new moon over his right shoulder—his whims and superstitions sate so lightly on him that they were not discerned as blemishes. He wore them frankly—this brave old man. There was no mean streak in him. He wore his worst side out. Some thought him lax and unbelieving. How little they knew of the breadth and depth of his vision and his piety! Free in his thinking he certainly was. A mind so truth-seeking could not be otherwise. But when, speaking of his almost life-long physical infirmity, which had deprived him of so much, he said it had been a blessing to him, securing to him people's best thoughts only, saving him from a vast deal of chaff, and compelling him to reliance on himself, shall we say there was no quiet faith in him and reverence? Asked what he thought of Christ, he replied: "What Peter answered to Jesus when asked Who do men say that I am? The son of man? And Peter answered and said Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. That is my faith," he said. An old minister, anxious about his condition, inquired of him shortly before his death as to his views. The old man made this beautiful reply: "As I grow older my faith grows simpler. I come more and more to the simple truth of salvation by Christ." He had no fears in looking out on the future. Called on one day by two friends, one a deacon, he replied to the other who said "You have had many mercies during your life:" "Yes, God has been very good to me. I do not believe that He is going to roast me on His gridiron hereafter;" and he playfully added, pointing to the deacon, "I don't believe *he* thinks so either." In this cheerful faith he awaited, longed for death. And when it came, as God's gifts come to his beloved, "in sleep," he passed to the everlasting waking. None needed to close his eyes, for from that sleep they woke no more.

Friends, are there not some worthy lessons which this life, now gone, speaks to us? Let us heed them, taking to heart the warning and the faith conveyed in this poem which he wrote :

As at midnight I was reading by my lamp's fitful gleam,
I fell into a slumber, and lo ! I dreamed a dream :
This outer world had undergone a great and sudden change,
And everything around me seemed wondrous new and strange.

No sunlight, no moonlight, no starlight glittered there !
A mild and shady twilight seemed to permeate the air ;
And there sate the blessed Jesus. No golden throne had he,
But was clad in simple majesty, as erst in Galilee.

Behind him, Justice, Mercy, Truth, safe guides in earthly things,
Their functions now absorbed in him, all stood with folded wings ;
And the Recording Angel, with deeply sorrowing look,
Took in his hands and opened the all-containing Book.

There came a distant murmur, as of waves upon the shore.
While throngs on throngs unnumbered into the Presence pour :
By their instincts segregated here, nigh the close of time.
Rush the bad of every nation, of every age and clime.

They stop astonished, all abashed, and with attentive ear,
Tho' the angel's lips were moving, no accents could I hear.
Yet of that startled multitude to each like lightning came,
His life's continuous story, its mingled guilt and shame.

From all the secrets there disclosed, oh ! who could lift the veil ?
Or of the varied shades of wrong unfold the dreadful tale
Of kingly pride, plebeian spite, of violated trust,
Of mustering force, of hidden sin, cruelty and lust ?

Each has his due allotment,—and with agony of heart
The vast assemblage vanished at the thrilling word "Depart !"
There was no driving angel, and no extraneous force,
For conscience was accuser, and the punisher, Remorse.

When this I saw transacted, upon my face I fell ;
The anguish of that moment no human tongue can tell :
With throat convulsed and choking, I gasped, and strove to cry.
"Have mercy, Lord ! Oh mercy have ! a sinner lost am I !"

To look upon that face again, how was it I should dare ?
And yet I wildly ventured with the courage of despair ;
When that pitying eye fell on me, beaming mercy from above,
And I saw that smile ineffable of never dying love.

By so sudden a transition all stupefied I gazed,
Then in my members trembling, rose bewildered and amazed ;
But the kindest words of comfort the blessed Master spoke,
Which wrapped my soul in ecstasy, and sobbing I awoke.

Brattleboro, March 9, 1867.

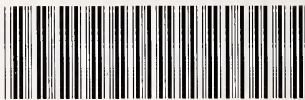
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